

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 SS-15 SP-02 NSC-05 L-03 H-01
IO-13 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01
USIA-06 PRS-01 SCA-01 EUR-12 SCS-03 MCT-01 /093 W
-----108492 192239Z /72

P 192113Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7612

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 3917

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, HO
SUBJECT: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS EVALUATION REPORT

REF: STATE 183842

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY CONCURS IN SUBJECT REPORT, WITH SEVERAL
SUGGESTIONS FOR CLARIFICATION. RECENT EVENTS NOTED REFTEL ARE
FURTHER DESCRIBED. END SUMMARY

2. REPORT AS IT DESCRIBES THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN
HONDURAS IS ACCURATE. RECENT OCCURRENCES WITH HUMAN RIGHTS
IMPLICATIONS CITED REFTEL ARE DISCUSSED IN PARAS (5) TO (8) BELOW.
DEPARTMENT ALSO MAY WISH TO INCLUDE, IN THE DESCRIPTIVE PORTION
OF THE REPORT, A REFERENCE TO THESE EVENTS AFTER SECOND LAST
SENTENCE PARA 4 (B) REFTEL, I.E., "THE OLANCHO AREA IS A
FRONTIER REGION WHERE THE AUTHORITY OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IS
NOT STONG. THE POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER VIOLENCE EXISTS, AND SOME
INCIDENTS HAVE OCCUREED INVOLVING HARASSMENT AND VEILED THREATS
DIRECTED AT SOCIAL WORKERS; INCLUDING PRIESTS. THERE IS NO INDICATION

THAT THESE ARE INSPIRED OR CONDONED BY THE GOH, WHICH IS CONTINUING ITS
EFFORTS TO COOPERATE WITH GROUPS WORKING IN THIS AREA."

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3. AS REGARDS THE ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SECTION,
EMBASSY SUGGESTS ELIMINATION OF LAST SENTENCE PARA 9 (2)
REFTEL OR ITS SUBSTITUTION AS FOLLOWS: "AMERICAN EMBASSY
OFFICERS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DISCUSS HUMAN RIGHTS ON AN OPEN
AND WIDE RANGING BASIS WITH HONDURAN OFFICIALS, PRESS AND
PUBLIC AT ALL LEVELS."

4. IN ADDITION, DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO CLARIFY LAST TWO SENTENCES REFTEL PARA 9 (1) AS FOLLOWS: "THE USG SHOULD SEEK MEANS OF MAKING KNOWN TO GOH POLICY MAKERS AND OTHERS ITS AWARENESS OF THE COMPARATIVELY GOOD HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IN HONDURAS. NEVERTHELESS, THE USG SHOULD NOT PROVIDE THE GOH WITH SPECIAL CLAIMS WHICH CAN BE VIEWED AS REQUIRING "REWARDS." PUBLIC STATEMENTS, ESPECIALLY FOR THE MEDIA, SHOULD AVOID THIS ULTIMATELY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE IMPLICATION. NATURALLY WE SHOULD NOT IGNORE, WHEN POSSIBLE, POSITIVE LEVERAGES THAT ARE APPROPRIATE, SUCH AS SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS."

5. FATHER EVARISTO BERTRAND: FATHER BERTRAND HAS NOT BEEN EXPELLED FROM HONDURAS, AND UPON THE CHURCH'S INTERVENTION, THE DEPORTATION ORDER WAS DROPPED. INITIALLY HE HAD BEEN GIVEN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. THIS WAS ALLEGEDLY IN RESPONSE TO PRESSURE FROM THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT, WHICH REPORTEDLY FELT THAT FATHER BERTRAND MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH SANDINISTA GUERRILLAS WHO ALLEGEDLY CROSSED THE BORDER TO SEE HIM. EMBASSY HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM OR DENY THIS VERSION. BEFORE COMING TO HONDURAS, FATHER BERTRAND HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM NICARAGUA. THE CHURCH IS CONSIDERING HIS POSSIBLE TRANSFER FROM THE BORDER AREA. FOR THE PRESENT, FATHER BERTRAND IS STILL IN DANLI, ABOUT 40 MILES FROM TEGUCIGALPA.

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6. FATHER EMILIO: THE EMBASSY ASSUMES THAT "FATHER EMILIO" REFERS TO FATHER RICHARD PRESTON, ALSO KNOWN AS FATHER RICARDO. WHILE THE FACTS REMAIN SOMEWHAT CONFUSED, IT APPEARS THAT FATHER PRESTON HAD, ON THE EVENING PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT, TOLD A NEWSPAPER REPORTER, WHO HAPPENED TO BE IN THE AREA, TO GO TO THE FUSEP (POLICE) HEADQUARTERS IN HIS PARISH AS THERE WAS A POSSIBLE STORY INVOLVING A MAN WHO WAS IN SOME MANNER BEING ABUSED IN FRONT OF THE STATION. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS PERSON WAS BEING ABUSED BY POLICE AGENTS OR OTHER PARTIES. THE NEXT DAY FATHER PRESTON WAS DRIVING FROM HIS PARISH TO ANOTHER TOWN WHEN HE WAS STOPPED BY ANOTHER CAR. AFTER SOME DISCUSSION, FATHER PRESTON STARTED TO DRIVE AWAY. SEVERAL SHOTS WERE FIRED APPARENTLY AS A WARNING BECAUSE OF THE INCIDENT THE DAY BEFORE. FATHER PRESTON FEELS THAT THIS WAS NOT AN "ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION" AS HE WAS IN POINT-BLANK RANGE AND AN EASY TARGET IF THAT HAD BEEN THE INTENT.

7. DEPARTURE OF PRIESTS: TWO OTHER USC PRIESTS, FATHERS PAUL AND LUCAS, HAVE LEFT THE OLANCHO AREA, PERHAPS ONLY TEMPORARILY, AFTER FRIENDS IN THEIR PARISH WARNED THEM THAT THEY MIGHT BE SUBJECT TO ATTACK BY UNNAMED SOURCES. EMBOFFS HAVE TALKED WITH BOTH PRIESTS AND IT DOES NOT APPEAR

THAT THEY RECEIVED DIRECT THREATS. AS IN THE CASE OF SEVERAL NUNS WHO REPORTEDLY HAVE ALSO LEFT THE AREA, THE TWO PRIESTS WERE NERVOUS BECAUSE OF THE OLANCHO EVENTS OF JUNE, 1975 AND WERE, UNDERSTANDABLY, PERHAPS REACTING TO PERCEIVED, RATHER THAN ACTUAL, THREATS.

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IO-13 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01
USIA-06 PRS-01 SCA-01 EUR-12 SCS-03 MCT-01 /093 W
-----108561 192239Z /72

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7613

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 3917

8. CHURCH STATEMENT: THE STATEMENT CITED REFTEL WAS ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PASTORAL WORK, AND IS NOT AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THE CHURCH. THE COMMITTEE IS HOWEVER A CHURCH BODY. THE STATEMENT ITSELF IS BASED ON THE WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT CONDONES, IF IT IS NOT ACTUALLY BEHIND SOME OF THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON JESUITS IN THAT COUNTRY AND IMPLIES SIMILAR GOVERNMENT OR OFFICIAL HONDURAN SUPPORT FOR THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN OLANCHO. WHILE THE ATMOSPHERE OF VIOLENCE MAY BE ANALOGOUS, THE SITUATION IS DIFFERENT. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THE OLANCHO EVENTS ARE LINKED TO OFFICIAL OR SEMI-OFFICIAL AGENCIES. OLANCHO IS A SPRAWLING, RUGGED AREA WITH POOR TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS THAT HAS APTLY BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE "WILD WEST." IN THIS FRONTIER SITUATION, EMOTIONS ARE OFTEN UNCURBED, AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S POWER AND INFLUENCE ARE SPREAD THIN. AS NOTED IN THE DRAFT REPORT, THE GOH IS MAKING EFFORTS TO FULFILL ITS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS AREA INCLUDING THE PROSECUTION OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE IN THE OLANCHO CASE. IN THIS CONNECTION, A HIGH-RANKING GOH OFFICIAL RECENTLY INFORMED THE CHARGE THAT THE COURT WILL SENTENCE THE ACCUSED IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TEGUCI03917
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770300-0839
Format: TEL
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770842/aaaabjex.tel
Line Count: 167
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 97c88457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 183842
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1543416
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS EVALUATION REPORT
TAGS: SHUM, HO, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/97c88457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009